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Joy
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By
Alice Cook Fuller

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March Brothers, *Publishers*
208, 210, 212 Wright Ave., Lebanon, O.

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no.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

JOY BRANSCOMBE, the heroine.

JOHN BRANSCOMBE, Joy's brother, and owner of the L V Cattle Ranch.

JIM STRONG, foreman of the L V, and Joy's lover.

SHORTY, a cowboy, lover of Joy, rival of Strong, and a rustler.

STEVE, accomplice of Shorty, enemy of Strong, old employee of L V.

WING, the Chinese cook.

REDDY, a cowboy; an old and trusted employee of the L V.

MISS ALTA WOODBE, an elderly would-be coquette, and admirer of Reddy.

TOMMY, another old employee of the L V.

HANK, THOMPSON and SCHWARTZ, cowboys, and new employees of the L V.



JOY OF THE L V.

A THREE-ACT COMEDY FOR TWELVE CHARACTERS

BY

ALICE COOK FULLER

SCENERY.—*All ranch buildings are of logs, the trees anything but evergreen, and L V in brown "brands" on every available space about the ranch. Saddles, quirts, spurs, bridles, etc., in evidence any and everywhere.*

ACT I—SCENE I.

TIME.—Afternoon.

PLACE.—Outside the bunkhouse of the L V, a Montana cattle ranch. Curtain rises, discovering a lounging group of cowboys. Some are shaking dice, one braiding a quirt, Hank and Steve talking low, Shorty cleaning his "gun," Reddy whittling and whistling softly.

Shorty (rises and strolls over to U. C. As he passes each group he makes some unpleasant comment). That's all wrong (to quirt maker). Ha, lost that time, didn't you (to dicer). Do shut up that everlasting tune! (to Reddy). (Sullenly examines gun once more.)

(Enter Wing, U. C., peers far to right).
Nope, no come yet.

Reddy. Hello, Wing! What's the matter with you?

Wing. Me lookee for Missee Branscombe. Me make her nice hot laspbelly pie. She like um, lot. You see um come, Leddy?

Reddy. Nope, Wingski. 'Taint time yet.

(Wing shuffles U. C., passing Shorty.)

Shorty (kicking Wing). Keep out of the way of white folks, you yellow ape! Stay in the cook house, where you belong. (Seats self.)

(Exit Wing, rubbing himself tenderly.)

Steve. Ought to be here pretty soon, though. Strong has the little buckskins, and they get over ground like coyotes.

Tommy. Sixty miles isn't done in a minute. They would start early, though, so it would be cooler, but (squints at sun) it's nearly four, now.

Schwartz. They start early always if the young miss be ready. Not?

Tommy. Miss Branscombe will be ready, and don't you forget it!

Reddy. You don't seem to be next to the fact, Schwartz, that the young lady is the boss's sister, and simply as fine as they make 'em.

Schwartz. Oh, ja! I know. But sometimes young ladies they keep one waiting. They hurry not for the pleasure of any one.

Reddy and Tommy. Not that young lady!

Tommy. Joy Branscombe has been coming out to the L V to spend her summers ever since she was twelve. She knows ranch life and

"what's what" out here as well as she knows what's the same in a Chicago hotel drawing-room. And let me put you next. She isn't the kind that keeps people waiting.

Schwartz. Well, one thing is sure. It will be a nuisance having any woman 'round telling what we should do and what not. Women are all alike. They butt in.

Reddy and Tommy. Not Joy Branscombe!

Schwartz. Pah! Imbeciles!

Tommy. "Pah!" yourself, *Schwartz*. You got about as much chivalry as a Piute Indian.

Schwartz (straightening up). Neffer, then, has she interfered?

(*Tommy*, *Reddy* and *Steve* look at one another, then roar with laughter.)

Steve. Never? Well, mebbly once!

Reddy. There was a time when she came back from college that she thought we need not be such savages, so she brought a trunkful of linen. She put up frills and do-dads here and there, and sash curtains up at the bunk house windows, and one night when we rolled in from the roundup, done to a frazzle, and undressed by pullin' off our boots and hangin' up our holsters, we started to turn and found—

Tommy, Steve and Reddy. Sheets! (laugh heartily).

Schwartz. Sheets?

Reddy. Sheets. You bet. On our bunks!

Schwartz. Then what?

Tommy. We folded 'em up careful and put 'em away. We were goin' to put 'em back on

in the mornin' so she wouldn't suspect, and have her feelin's hurt. But an old gray wolf started a stampede among the cattle that night, and we hopped out without waitin' to do up our chamber work.

Reddy. And while we were gone the Chink came in to make up the bunks, found the sheets and took 'em to the boss to find what he should do with them. She was there, and *quen-se-contly* we didn't get any more white bed linen.

Schwartz (enjoyingly). Mad, of course!

Reddy (scornfully). Mad, nothin'. She nearly laughed herself to death at the joke on herself. When a lady can appreciate a joke, when that joke is on herself, she is a-bout all-right! From that minute Joy Branscombe was the one girl in the world for the old L V.

Steve. She's bringin' her chaperon along again this year, Red.

Reddy (much disturbed). What one?

Steve. The one that took such a shine to you. Miss Willbe? Wontbe?

Reddy. Miss Woodbe? Miss Alta Woodbe? (sadly).

Tommy. That's it, Reddy, boy. Guessed it first time. (*Reddy rises.*) Keep your seat, don't get excited. We won't interfere. (*Rises and sidles over to Reddy, imitating Miss Woodbe's gushing twitter.*) Oh, Mr. Reddy! Do tell me what makes that dear little creature bleat like that. Is it dangerous? Ah, I feel so safe when I think that your strong right arm—

Reddy (knocks Tommy over). Oh, get out! Think you're funny, don't you?

Tommy (rising and dusting himself). "Strong right arm" all right, Red, but I didn't need such convincin' proof. Hello, here they come now! (All except Shorty rise.)

Reddy. All ready, boys? Now. One, two, three!

All (except Shorty). Whoo-ee-e! (Swing hats.) Whoo-ee-e! Whoo-ee-e!

Joy (from a distance). Whoo-ee-e!

(All, except Schwartz and Shorty, begin preparations for her coming. They brush off trousers and sleeves, re-tie neckkerchiefs, straighten out and re-dent hat crowns, comb hair with fingers. Reddy takes a bit of broken mirror from shirt pocket, and combs hair with a pocket comb.)

Tommy. Aw, quit it, Red! You're too fascinatin' already. The rest of us don't stand a ghost of a show with the ladies when you smooth your Tishun locks like that an' *smile*.

Reddy. Run away, little boy. It's wicked to be envious as you are. You heard her say she loved red hair, and that's why—

Tommy. You're all mixed up. She said she loved brown hair with red glints in it.

Steve (musingly). Strong's hair *is* brown, isn't it?

Shorty (angrily). Strong's? Jim Strong's?

Reddy. Hello, Shorty! Come alive, have you? Glad to see you. Fine day!

Tommy (striking an attitude). James Strong. The same. You have named him. Our honored and honorable foreman!

Shorty. Honored, yes—and not proved *dis-honorable*—yet.

Reddy. What do you mean, Shorty?

Tommy. Aw, shut up, Shorty. Forget your grouch! There's not a decenter, squarer, more upright fellow on the range than Jim Strong, and you know it.

Shorty. That's just exactly what I don't know.

Reddy (walks up to Shorty). Look here, Shorty. If you've anything to say about Jim Strong, spit it out like a man or else shut up. You are always sneering about Jim, but nobody has ever heard what you got agin him. Spit it out, I tell you.

Shorty. I will when I get good and ready. I know more about him than any one of you. An' I know what he's doin' right now that would finish him up in an hour if I told it.

(Enter John Branscombe U. C., and Joy and Miss Woodbe U. L.)

John (embraces Joy warmly). Welcome home, little sister. We have been pretty lonesome without you. Pretty lonesome. (Shakes hands with Miss Woodbe, kissing her lightly on the cheek.) Welcome to you, too, Cousin Alta. I am very glad to have you here with Joy. Very glad.

(While the following is going on, Joy greets Steve and Tommy warmly, and is introduced to

Hank, Thompson and Schwartz, with whom she shakes hands.)

Miss Woodbe. Oh, Cousin John! You mustn't. You really mustn't. I'm not used to that, you know (bridling and twittering). It is really embarrassing. Just see how you have made me blush. (Both down stage to C., Shorty following.) Joy and I had a perfectly glorious drive. That young Mr. Stout—

Joy (over her shoulder). Mr. Strong, Alta. (Down stage toward L.)

Miss Woodbe. Oh, yes, to be sure I meant Mr. Strong, of course. (Sees Shorty). Oh, how do you do, Mr. Shorty? How *do* you do?. (Shakes hands.) As I was saying, John, Mr. Strong proved so entertaining. He is well to do, too, isn't he? He knows a great deal about the range country, and as I say, he has a fine start in life for so young a man. I asked him about it—how people got a start like that out here, and he said—(laughs affectedly)—dear me, he is so amusing and entertaining—he said many of them got their start by having a good pony and a long rope. Wasn't that clever of him?

Shorty. It is, mighty clever of him, so long as he doesn't get caught using them (moves up stage to R.).

Miss Woodbe (eyes following Shorty). I do not think he quite rightly grasped my meaning (talks to Branscombe).

Reddy (moves down stage to L., keeping carefully behind the others, out of sight of Miss

Woodbe). Miss Joy, you haven't said how d'y'do? to me, yet. I'm feelin' awful lonesome. If you don't say something to me pretty soon, I'm afraid I'll cry. I'm feelin' mighty choked up right now.

Joy. Why, you poor boy! (gives him both her hands). How could I have overlooked you of all others? It seems so good to see you again, Reddy. Come on over here, now, and tell me every single thing you know about the L V. What's happened? Who is where? And when does the round-up begin, and where does it start? (Leads Reddy down stage to L. C.)

Reddy. First, the round-up begins tomorrow, on Owl Creek. Plenty near enough for you to ride over. There are a good many new men. Jack, Bob, Barker, Nolan and about a half dozen others of the old lot went down to Argentine. I didn't. Knew you'd be coming back here this year, ag'in, and wild horses couldn't have dragged me away (fervently). (Joy laughs enjoyingly.) No, but seriously, Miss Joy, we have been having some little trouble. Cattle rustlers have been at work around here. The queer part of it is, the L V has been almost the only loser. Guess we've lost as many as thirty critters this last month. We're layin' for to catch them, and when we do you can believe things'll happen—fast! (Moves out from behind others. Miss Woodbe sees him.) It's this way—

Miss Woodbe. Dear me, Mr. Reddy. I didn't see you before. (Coquettishly offers both hands.)

I do hope you will forgive me! It was utterly unintentional, I assure you. Say that you forgive my seeming carelessness!

Reddy. Sure thing! Never noticed it. Fine day. (Tries to release her hands, in vain. As she talks he takes both in his left while he mops face with bandanna in right, tries to drop them, changes hands, and mops face with left, tucking handkerchief under arm while making the transfer.)

Miss Woodbe. How dear and kind of you. And how sweet it is to see you again, and be welcomed thus warmly by old and dear, dear friends. You have not changed a particle. Just the same. Just the same, even to that little curl in your hair. (Boys back of her double up with silent laughter. Signal to Reddy; pantomime their hopelessness of his state. He tries once more to release her hands, fails, transfers them a time or two, and mops his face again.) Oh, really, though, you shouldn't forget and hold my hands this way right before all these people. I really didn't notice. I'll have to run away. I feel so confused. (Exits, waving coyly at him.)

Reddy (sinking limply to a box near by). Heavings, Maude! That's worse than a week straight, in the saddle!

Joy. Reddy, you are a perfect dear. And I like your kindhearted self more than I can say.

Branscombe. I say, one of you boys bring in the ladies' trunks, will you? Eh! will you? (Shorty exits R. All others rush off to L., re-

turning with two trunks on shoulders of two of them, others all holding them in place and helping. Exit to U. L., led by Branscombe. Joy moves up stage to C., and as she is about to exit, enter Strong down R.)

Strong. Joy!

Joy (moves D. C.). Yes?

Strong. Sweetheart, won't you answer my question now?

Joy. Question?

Strong. Please, Joy, be kind. Answer me, do.

Joy. What can you mean? I am sure you asked me no question. You did make statements—cold, plain statements.

Strong. Please, Joy.

(Shorty is seen to enter U. R. Listening, shows savage anger.)

Joy. You said that your circumstances were materially improved since last year. *That* wasn't a question. (Walks pettishly D. R.)

Strong. I said that I had bought a ranch of my own, and asked—

Joy. Oh, yes. The A K, wasn't it? (Returns to C.)

Strong. And that at the rate I was being enabled to stock it, it would be only a few months until I could put it into the hands of a capable manager, such as Reddy, for instance, and we could go to Europe on our—

Joy (interrupting, hastily). Oh, yes, I remember distinctly. And I asked if you had discovered a gold mine, and you laughed and said it was an iron mine.

Strong. So it was. An iron mine in Pennsylvania.

Shorty (aside). Before I get through with you, Mr. Foreman, your iron mine will be located nearer than Pennsylvania.

Joy (shrugging, goes U. C.). Let's talk of something light. Iron is such a deadly heavy subject.

Strong. Very well. We will talk of you. You are the light of my life—light of my eyes—light of my heart—light—

Joy. Oh, Jim (laughing unwillingly), do be sensible.

Strong (seriously). With all my heart. Joy, dearest, will you be my wife?

Joy (pretending amazement). Why, Jimmie! Was that what you meant all the time? Yes (softly), I will.

Strong (embracing her). You darling fraud! (Shorty threatens Strong and exits, still unseen, U. C.)

(Enter Reddy, R. C.)

Reddy. Sorry to interrupt you, Strong, but the boss wants you right away.

Strong. All right, Reddy. Be there in a minute.

(Reddy starts to cross to L., sees Miss Woodbe who appears there a moment, and he beats a hasty retreat.)

Strong. Joy, dearest, tell me when you will—

Joy. Dear me, Jimmie! What a progressive young man you are!

(Enter Wing, U. C.)

Wing. How do, Missee Blanscombe? Me glad see you 'g'in.

Joy. Oh, how do you do, Wing? (Shakes hands.)

Wing. You come to cook house? Me got fine laspbelly pie for you.

Joy. Indeed I shall. That was awfully good of you, Wing, to remember how I love raspberry pie. I'll be there in one minute.

Wing. You no let um get cold, Missee Blanscombe?

Joy. Not for the world, Wing.

(Exit Wing, U. C.)

Strong. If these meddlesome people would stay away long enough perhaps you'd kiss me again. (She does so.) Now tell me that you will ride to the round-up with me tomorrow.

Joy. Yes, yes. Of course! Do hurry, Jimmie. John will be furious if you keep him waiting.

Strong. I suppose so. Well, good-bye for the moment.

Joy. Good-bye.

(Exit Jim, D. R.)

(Enter Shorty, U. C., meeting Joy at C., steps in front of her as she goes toward R. C.)

Joy. What is it, Shorty?

Shorty (defiantly). I want to know if I kin ride to the round-up with you tomorrow?

Joy. Nonsense, Shorty! Of what are you thinking? You know as well as I do (severely) that it never has been the habit of the range to presume upon my friendliness.

Shorty. We're changin' our habits out here, I guess. I ain't the first one to ask you, I bet.

Joy. We will not discuss the subject.

Shorty. Oh, yes, we will. Kin I ride with you?

Joy. No!

Shorty (doggedly). Who you ridin' with?

Joy (crisply). We all ride together as usual, I suppose.

Shorty. You ridin' with Jim Strong?

Joy (haughtily). If I choose.

Shorty. Jim's not much more than a puncher hisself, and not an all-fired good one at that.

Joy. Mr. Strong is a gentleman, whatever your opinion of his abilities on the range. We will not discuss him.

Shorty. You sha'n't go with him, I tell you!

Joy. Shorty, you forget yourself! Come, be sensible. We have been good friends for so many years, do not make further friendship impossible.

Shorty. I don't want to be friends with you. You know what I think about you—what I have always thought about you.

Joy. You are not like yourself. I can not understand—

Shorty. Yes, you do. You know I love you, and have ever since you been comin' here summers—ever since you was a little, short-skirted, slim thing with long braids and freckles. (Joy explores bridge of nose with forefinger, for freckles.) I loved you then an' I love you now, an' that cursed sneakin' foreman aint comin' in

here on my range with his fine education an' pretty manners an' take you from me, neither. You liked me in them days an' you'd more than like me now if it wa'n'a for him. I'd like to spoil—

Joy. Stop! Raving like a madman will do you no good. Try to realize this one fact. If you were the only man I knew on earth I would rather die than marry you. Can't you see that? Can you not understand that while I have always liked and trusted you as a friend that the thought of you as a lover makes me fairly shiver?

Shorty. Mebbe you feel that way now, but when you see your handsome beau hangin' to a cottonwood tree, shot full of holes because he's been stealin' other people's stock, mebbe then you'll change your mind.

Joy. What do you mean?

Shorty. I mean that Jim Strong's nothin' but a blank rustler, an' I can prove it. And what's more, I will. You think you're goin' to marry him some day, but you aint, I tell you. You're goin' to marry *me*! Yes, if I have to kill that cattle-thievin' foreman with my own hands, an' carry you off across my saddle.

Joy. Go! Go at once! And do not ever dare to speak to me again. Go, I say!

Shorty. I'll go, all right. But remember—"Every dog has his day"—today's Jim Strong's. But mine's comin' and comin' soon! (Exit Shorty, D. R.)

Joy. The horrible creature. He is a savage—enough of a savage to do as he says. What

shall I do? (Weeps.) What shall I do? Jim is out on the range every day and that murderous creature could shoot him almost any time and make it appear an accident. I can't tell John, he would only laugh at me, and tell me it isn't worth a second thought. Oh, dear, if I only had some one to help me!

(Enter Wing U. C.)

Wing. Whassa mattah, Missee Blanscombe? You mad? You solly? Somebody be closs to you? You tellee ol' Wing. Me smash um face. Me kick um to Jellico!

Joy. No, no, Wing. I'm just silly, that's all. And a little anxious.

Wing. Shorty makee you solly? (Joy nods.) See, Missee, you lookee out for him. He bad man. He got gun. He shoot. Biff! bing! quickee likee dat. He got big boot, too. (Rubs himself reminiscently.) Ne' min'. You blacee up, Missee Blanscombe. I bet I bakee you nothla laspbelly pie, then you feel bettah.

Joy (laughing). Good old Wing. Yes, do bake one, and I am sure I shall feel better. (Wing crosses to U. C.) And, by the way, Wing, I think I shall have you help me keep an eye on Shorty. He is a bad man, and I do not want any trouble here among the boys on my account.

Wing. All light! You no go way not tell ol' Wing?

Joy. Most certainly not, Wing.

Wing. You do, you pie gettee all col'. Um be no good allee samee. (Exit Joy U. L.)

Wing. Dat lillie gal solly 'bout somepin. Me make two pies. (Exit U. R.)

(Strong enters, buckling holster. Shorty creeps stealthily across from Up. L. to Up. C.. Turning, he draws "gun" from holster and deliberately aims at Strong. Wing appears for a moment at Up. R. Shorty turns gun on him, and he flings up hands and flees.)

Strong (without turning around). Put up your shooting irons, Shorty, and take a bit of advice from me. If you want to do murder choose a less frequented spot. I'd hate to die and carry a photograph in my eye in which you were hanging to the beam of your own cabin.

Shorty. Dunno but your advice is good. (Advances close to Strong.) There's harder ways for a cattle thief to die than by shooting, after all, an' I want to give you all there is comin' to you, you sneakin' Rustler!

Strong. Gently, Shorty, gently. You know perfectly well that there is only one man in the L V outfit that that name fits, and it isn't I. Come to think of it, you are the only one beside myself that knows who it is.

Shorty. You mean *me*? I'll not forget that, Mr. Strong. And let me tell you (savagely), me an' this (pats gun) will *get* you yet! (Crosses to Down L.)

Strong. And just one word more. Keep your contemptible self away from the ladies on this ranch or I'll shoot you so full of holes that there'll be nothing left to bury!

(Shorty pulls gun. Strong stands looking steadfastly at him. He lowers it.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II—SCENE I.

TIME.—A week later.

PLACE.—A cottonwood grove.

SCENERY.—*A large rock (made from brown Holland shading) occupies a prominent place to the left of the center of stage. Against this leans Shorty, talking to Steve. As the curtain rises Shorty writes laboriously with a stubby pencil on a scrap of paper.*

Shorty. There, now! How's that? (Business.) I bet that will set the boss to thinkin'.

Steve. Read her out loud, Shorty, and see how she sounds.

Shorty (reads). Mr. Branscombe: You better keep an eye on your foreman. All folks ain't as honest as they look. Mebbe he knows somethin' about them calves you're lookin' for.

A FRIEND.

Steve. That'll fetch him. But how will you get it to him without him suspicioning who sent it?

Shorty. I got that all fixed. Here's an envelope that he got a letter in last week. It come ungummed, so it aint tore open. The postmark's blurred, and the stamp cancelled. It is just ready to slip the letter in. Looks like as though it was meant for just this. (Puts letter in and seals it.)

Steve. But it won't go through the post office that-a-way.

Shorty. Not much, it won't. You are goin' to take it and drop it near the bunkhouse *after* Reddy passes there. Somebody will pick it up an' take it to the boss. Reddy goes for the mail today and the boss will think he dropped it.

Steve. But that's a mighty slow way of getting even with Strong. That's just worryin' at him.

Shorty. . Don't you fret, Steve. I'll fix that up. I aint forgettin' that you ought to of been foreman of this outfit 'stead of Jim Strong. Listen. This is just a starter to get the boss to thinkin' along the right lines. You remember that old spotted cow with the twin calves that nearly finished Tommy on the round-up yesterday?

Steve. I wouldn't be like to forget that old co-boss. Threw my rope on her and she started plungin' for me all bellow and horns. Reddy roped her too, or she'd a sure got me. He saw her, plain enough, and so did half a dozen of the other boys. She was sure one fierce one. Don't think any of us will be liable to forget her very soon, or her wabby calves, either.

Shorty. Neither do I. And there's my plan. She's got the L V brand on her as plain as paint. The calves ain't branded—yet. The two of us can plan some way to get sent in together when they throw that first bunch back on the home range, and the rest will be easy. For that old cow and her two calves are in it. We'll stop off

at the coulee by the lower bunch of cottonwoods. I've got a set of branding irons cached there for use in emergencies. They are the A K brand. *And* Strong bought out the A K a month ago. He's interfered with my business ever since I first knew him. It's only fair to take turn about. We'll put that brand on the two little critters an' turn 'em loose. The first puncher that sees the A K brand on 'em will know right then who it is that's stealin' the L V calves. Right there is where Jim Strong begins to get his. Rustlin' is a mighty unpopular trade on this range, and it's liable to go hard with the Rustler.

Steve. Don't you reckon that the boss will drop on to the fact that somebody is double-crossing Strong? You know the boss is pretty smart, for all he's so peppery.

Shorty. I thought of that. I've fixed it up, though. Here are some drawin's that will do the work. See, it's dead easy. I've taken the L V brand and changed it to an A K, on this paper.

Steve. I don't quite savvy.

Shorty (testily). Why, look here. (Picks up a stone, tailor's chalk, and marks distinctly on the rock against which he leans.) Here's the L V brand (business), and these dotted lines turn it into an A K (business). It makes a bigger brand, but the L V is unusually small.

Steve (chuckling). Good work, Shorty, old boy!

Shorty. See how it is done, don't you? (Steve nods assent.)



(The L V brand, with dotted lines showing how it can be changed to A K.)

Shorty. Now these belong in the hands of the Boss. We can't give 'em to him, so they got to be *found*—found by some of Jim Strong's friends. See? (Steve nods.) I'll stick these in that book of Jim's that he left at the bunk house last night. They'll match, for I took these leaves out of it this morning. I'll leave 'em lyin' around. They'll reach the Boss, alright, alright. These will set him to thinkin'. This drawin' with the letter and the branded calves, and that A K branding iron left lyin' careless-like around in the coulee ought pretty near do the work.

Steve. You sure are some handy man with a pencil, Shorty. If I was the Boss I'd keep my eagle eye on you.

Shorty (jumps to his feet and pulls "gun"). What?

Steve. Aw, sit down, Shorty. I was only joshin'.

Shorty (slips gun into holster). Well, mebbly. But I'd advise you to have that sense of humor of yours amputated. It's likely to get you into trouble. Well, come on. We better be moseyin' along. You go by way of Scrub Oaks, an' I'll

ride across through Antelope Creek. Best not be seen together too often nowadays. (Exit Shorty R. C.).

Steve (preparing to leave, and addressing Shorty's vanished figure). It's all right for you to get huffy when I suggest you are a handy man at changin' brands. You don't know that *I* know that you have learned to change the L V to a double triangle, too, and that the A K ain't the only branding iron you're usin' to blot brands with. One simple little line from top to point of L, an' another little line across the top of the V, an' there you have it neat as can be. That's what you're doin' for yourself, Mr. Shorty. An' I'll keep still just now. I ain't lookin' for trouble. I'll keep on playin' that I'm mad because Strong got the foreman's job. *But* when this has all blown over, I propose to declare in on the double triangle brand of cattle, and we'll go halves, though you don't know, yet, that you've got a partner in prospect. You'll have to divvy. I've got the goods on you. You think I'm helpin' because I hate Strong. But all the time it's for business reasons. (Holds up imaginary glass.) Here's to a profitable partnership in the Double Triangle outfit.

ACT II—SCENE II.

TIME.—The next morning.

PLACE.—Before the L V bunkhouse.

(Enter Branscombe D. R., and Joy and Strong L. C., hand in hand.)

Joy and Strong. Brother John!

Brans. What's this? What's this?

Strong. I've come to ask you for the dearest girl in the world.

Brans. Tut, tut. What are you thinking of? She's only a child.

Joy. I am twenty, John.

Brans. Twenty? Impossible! Twenty? Why, it isn't two years ago you were romping around here in short skirts and pigtail braids. Twenty? Bless me. How time flies! But here, *Strong.* You'll have to wait till I look you up. I know only good of you, but when it comes to giving you this little girl I'll have to be doubly sure you are worthy.

Strong. You are right. And thank you, Branscombe. I'll take good care of her, I swear.

Brans. Of course you will. Of course. But wait. Remember I have promised nothing definite. Not yet. Nothing definite.

Strong. No, but you will, for the record's clean, Branscombe. (*Brans. turns to L. up stage.*)

Joy. Oh, John, I forgot. Here is a letter I found just now. Reddy must have dropped it when he gave me mine.

Brans. Run along, you two. I'll see both of you at supper. (*Joy embraces Branscombe. Exit both.*)

Brans. (*reads letter aloud. Shows irritation.*) Anonymous! Not worth a moment's attention. (*Starts to destroy it, but finally puts it in his*

pocket. Tommy, studying papers in hand, is seen crossing from R. C. to up C.) Hey, you, Tommy!

Tommy. Hullo, Mr. Branscombe. I was just looking for you. I got something I think you'd ought to see.

Brans. What is it?

Tommy. Looks to me as though somebody with a handy branding iron and a lot of nerve was trying to put something over on the L V. Neat work, though! (Hands paper to Branscombe.)

Brans. Blotted the L V brand! Where did you get this?

Tommy. Bunkhouse. In a book.

Brans. Bring the book here, will you? (Tommy does so.) Why, what's this? How did Jim Strong's book get into the bunkhouse? He doesn't stay there.

Tommy. Didn't know it was Jim's. He must have brought it last night when we were talking over the new corral plans.

Brans. I see. (Compares paper in book with that of drawings.) Who owns the A K outfit?

Tommy. Why, you know. The International Company. Or, no, Strong bought it a couple of months ago.

Brans. Um, hum! And the L V brand is changed to an A K. I begin to see. I begin to see.

Tommy. Sufferin' Mulhooley's black cats! You don't think for a minute that Jim Strong

would do a low down thing like that? Why, Mr. Branscombe, that's rustling! Why, Mr. Branscombe, Jim never drawed that any more than I did. He is as square as they make 'em. He couldn't. He wouldn't. He—why—Jim is—why—well, why in blazes don't you say something?

Brans. Simply because there is nothing to be said—at present.

Tommy. But you don't get me! I tell you, Boss, Jim couldn't do a thing like that. He's clean. He's square (half crying with helpless rage). Some low down sneak has done this dirty work to get Strong in bad, but if I ever get my mitts on the measley cur there won't be a grease spot left of him!

Brans. All right, Tommy. Of course Jim's always been square. Don't say anything to any of the boys.

Tommy (turning to Up. R.). I won't. Shorty and two or three others saw it, too, though.

Brans. Tell Strong I want to see him, Tommy.

Tommy. Yes, sir. (Exit. Enter Strong Up. R.).

Strong. You wanted me, Mr. Branscombe?

Brans. Yes. You—ah—hum—you spoke to me about my—about Joy not long ago.

Strong (eagerly). Yes.

Brans. Well, I've changed my mind. I will *not* see both of you at supper tonight. In fact, I won't see you at all. I've changed my mind. I refuse my consent. And if you have anything

to say to any of the Branscombe family you will please say it to me, hereafter. Understand?

Strong. You mean?

Brans. (crisply). Exactly what I say. That's all. (Nods dismissal. Enter Reddy, L. C., and exit Strong, R. Up.)

Reddy. Here's the mail, Mr. Branscombe. It's some extensive this time sure. There's an express package in there as big as a house. It's heavy, too. Probably samples from Strong's iron mine.

Brans. All right, Reddy. (Sorts letters. Reads label on package.) Mr. George Hedrick. That's Shorty's name on mail days and pay days, isn't it?

Reddy. Yep. But I never knew him to get even so much as a paper before.

Brans. Here, these belong to the boys. Put them in the bunkhouse, Reddy. (Exit Reddy, U. C., and Branscombe briskly, L. C. Enter Shorty, carrying package, and followed by Steve. Shorty opens package and takes out a half dozen flasks of liquor. Inspects each admiringly.)

Shorty. It costs like radium, but it'll do the work, and the Range is well rid of our han'some Foreman. A little whiskey an' a little knowledge is a dangerous thing—for the Innocent Bystander. Strong is the Innocent Bystander this time. These new men will go at the job like kids at a pan of popcorn balls. They've been on the Range long enough to know that a Rustler is a rattlesnake. Strong rides alone over to the B Z B today, and while the boys are givin' him

what's comin' to him, you an' me will be busy puttin' a nice fresh A K on them twin calves. We'll have to kill the old cow, I reckon, to keep the little fellers near enough to the ranch to be easily found. (To cowboys outside.) Hey, boys, come in and have somethin' on me. It's my birthday. (Enter Schwartz, Thompson and Hank, eagerly.)

Steve (uneasily). Might not Miss Branscombe come along here?

Shorty. Nope. Saw her and the flirty lady ride off with the Boss five minutes ago. (All drink freely from proffered flasks.)

Steve. Anybody seen Strong lately?

Shorty. Oh, Jim's on his lonesome way to the B Z B. If I had as much on my conscience as Strong has I'd be afraid to ride past that upper bunch of cottonwoods. There's a dozen strong tempting branches stretchin' themselves out and cryin' for a rope an' a Rustler.

Schwartz. Why? What is the matter mit Mr. Strong?

Steve. Haven't you heard? Where you been all this time? Why, the Boss got a letter from some old friend tellin' him he had seen Strong putting a nice fresh A K over a perfectly good L V brand, and not leavin' a blurred line. The work was so fine he thought it ought to be brought to his Boss's notice. Peppery John took it hard.

Schwartz. Ha! A Rustler. I thought there was something about him——

Shorty. Just that. And we all know that a Rustler is a pizen snake, and only fit to be killed.

Steve. Or drove out of the country.

Shorty. Why, if he keeps it up, an' they don't get proof, they're likely to accuse you or me of doin' it. Nobody's safe. He gets us up at three o'clock in the mornin' and drives us like slaves all day till dark, and then has us strung up for Rustlin' when he stole the calves hisself.

Steve. A nice little necktie party to scare him out of the country would be about the thing for him.

Schwartz and Hank. You bet it would!

Thompson (swinging bottle). Let's give him one!

All. All right. We will. He will make nigger slaves of us, will he? He will accuse us of Rustling, will he? etc., etc.

Shorty. It's a good idea. Here, you, Thompson, you shall be captain, because you suggested it. Ain't that right, boys? To make the fellow that was smart enough to think of it, the captain?

All. Yes! Sure! Yes!

Shorty. See, now. We'll fix it this way. Thompson, Schwartz and Hank go round by Scrub Oaks and come in from the north, and Steve, here, and I will come in from the south. We'll catch him at the upper cottonwood grove. He's sure to stop there for water.

Thompson. That's the stuff. We'll rope him before he knows it.

Steve. You better, for he's handy with a gun.

Schwartz. Don't you fellows be late or you'll miss the gay time.

Shorty. Don't you worry. We want to see Jim Strong get his just as much as you do. He'd ought to reach the cottonwoods by (squints at the sun) —by ten o'clock. Here is a last good luck. (All drink.) Take the rest of it along with you, boys. I'll not celebrate like this again very soon. Ain't goin' to have any more birth-days. (Winks at Steve.)

All. Thanks, Shorty. (Wing appears from back of tree, U. R., and dodges back again, unseen by cowboys.)

Hank. You bet we will! Glad you had this one.

All (rise). Here we go. Whoop-ee-e! We'll put Foreman Strong where he won't rustle any more L V stuff. (All, except Shorty, exit, D. R.).

Shorty. And here's to the cottonwoods, ten o'clock, and a settlement of old scores. (Drinks. Exit, R. C. Enter Joy, in riding costume, U. L., crosses to U. R. and calls.)

Joy. Wing! Oh, Wing! (Enter Wing, D. L. Joy meets him at D. C.)

Wing. Me lookee for you evellywhere, Missee Blanscombe.

Joy. I had started away with my brother, when I remembered about supper. I want you to get up the very nicest little supper that you know how to get for me this evening. Use all the pretty china and glass. I expect to be spe-

cially happy tonight, and I want things to be festive.

Wing. You no time be festive. Mist' Stlong, he go to cottonwoods on cleek. Shorty, he give boys dlink (illustrates) and tell um Mist' Stlong he lustler. They kill um. You go quick. Bling Mist' Blanscombe. He fix um. Shorty, he no good. He bad man. He no nice (rubs himself). Blettah go quick. Ten o'clock, Shorty say. They lope him and *shoot!*

Joy. Shoot Mr. Strong for a rustler? Quick, *Wing.* Who told you?

Wing. Me hear. All new men and Steve and Shorty.

Joy (preparing to leave). Which grove, *Wing?* You know there are two.

Wing. Me no know. No hear um say. First tly lower. It closer.

Joy. Oh, *Wing,* I don't know what to do. How can I help most surely?

Wing. Go quick. You cly along load if you like. I go take out laspbelly pie. Hot, nice pie. Hully up. (Exit *Joy*, D. R.)

Wing. I bet that fix Mist' Shorty plenty some. (Rubs injured region.)

ACT III—SCENE I.

TIME.—9:50 a. m., same day as Act 2, Scene 2.

PLACE.—Same as Scene 1, Act 2.

Strong (off stage). There you are, old fellow (slaps horse). Go get yourself a drink of

water. (The "duff, duff, duff," of hoofs on sod is heard. Enter Strong, U. R.).

Strong (removes hat, mops face, throws hat and quirt aside, and himself full length in the shade). Whew! It is hot! The heat waves shiver up from the ground like fire. There isn't a breath of air stirring. (Looks to L. Sits up and looks intently.) What in smoke do those fellows mean by riding at such a pace on such a day? They'll kill their horses. There surely must be something wrong to make them ride like that. (Rising) Hey, you, there! Pull up. Get off those horses, you idiots, and cool them before you let them drink. What's up? What do you want? (Enter Thompson, Hank and Schwartz.)

Thompson. We want you.

Strong. Well, you have me. (Rope swirls over his head and tightens about his arms.)

Hank. You bet we have, and we're goin' to keep—keep you till—till—the cows come home.

Strong (angrily). Loose that rope! What do you mean by this performance? What does this mean, I say?

Hank. 'S a necktie party, Mr. Strong. 'S a nice li'l su'prise party on you. You rustled too many—too many nice li'l bossy calves, an' we're goin' to hang you up to a tree—nice cott'nwood tree.

Strong. You're drunk. Where did you get whiskey this far from town?

Hank. Ain't drunk. Drunk yerself. It's Shorty's birthday. He got li'l birthday present.

Divided with us. Shorty's gen'rous. Shorty's all right.

Thompson. Here, now, boys, I'm your cap-t'n, remember. Shorty said so. Here's 'nother rope. Put it round his neck, Schwartz. Neck-tie. See? (Schwartz obeys. It is slipped through a ring at the back of Strong's neck, which in turn has been previously fastened to a kind of harness under his clothing, so that he can be lifted from his feet, without pain. If Schwartz stands in front of Strong when adjusting it, he can throw a second twist of the first rope around his neck, and it will look to be the one he put there at the moment.)

Strong. Listen to me, boys. What's up?

Hank. Nothin'—yet. You will be in a minute—up a tree. (Laughter.)

Strong. What does this mean? I want the truth, now.

Thompson. It means that you are a dirty rustler and we are going to hang you.

Strong. "Rustler" is an ugly word in the cow country.

Thompson. You bet it is. But you are *it*, all right. Shorty knows what he's talking about and don't you forget it.

Strong. You are dead wrong, boys. I am no more a rustler than Hank, here, or you, Schwartz. You're drunk. Wait till you sober up, and, if you can prove it, you may hang me if you want to do so.

Schwartz. Nefer put off till tomorrow what you kin do this day. Come along. (Jerks rope.

Strong fights vigorously to free his arms. Thompson throws a third rope, and each man draws a gun.)

Thompson. There's a good tree yonder. (Strong is drawn under it, a rope thrown over a "limb," and Schwartz draws Strong up to his tiptoes, then lets him down.)

Thompson (sneeringly). Anything to say? Any little last message?

Strong. Nothing, boys, except to repeat that you are dead wrong. I never killed a cow, rustled a calf or blotted a brand in my life.

Hank (sweeping an unsteady gun about the circle to attract strict attention). Now, ain't he a nice li'l Willie-boy?

Thompson (to Strong). Then where did all that young stock on the A K come from?

Strong. I bought it with money left to me by an uncle, who died three months ago. I was the last of his family, and he left me a paying interest in some iron mines. Give this up, boys. Cut it out. You're wrong, I tell you. I *swear* it!

Hank. Naughty, naughty! Say, Strong—that iron mine—was it a *branding-iron* mine? (Laughter.)

Schwartz. Come, it iss hot. Let us make a finish. Shorty iss late. Let us not wait longer.

Thompson. Ready, then. (All point guns at Strong, who stands steadfast. The gallop of a horse is heard.) Steady, now. When I say three. One—two—

Joy (entering breathlessly, U. R.). Stop! Stop, I say! Are you mad? What would you do?

Strong. Joy! Go back!

Joy (blazing with anger). Indeed I shall not! (To cowboys.) Take off those ropes, instantly! Instantly, I say! (They do so.) Now tell me what this means.

Strong. It was a mistake on their part, Miss Branscombe. Some one tried to make them believe I had been rustling stock. They seem to have succeeded amazingly well.

Hank. Shorty says—

Strong. Shut up!

Joy. Shorty? So this really is Shorty's work? Hark, you, brave vigilantes (scornfully). Right this minute under that lower clump of trees a mile from here, Shorty and one other man are branding calves. That vicious cow which so nearly killed Tommy the other day, is lying dead on the edge of the coulee, and one of her calves with a fresh A K brand on it is standing beside her. If you get there in time you will see them brand the other. They had just thrown it as I crept away.

Thompson. Shorty? Are you sure?

Joy. Do you think for a moment I would accuse a man of a crime like that if I were not sure?

Hank (sobered). Shorty! Shorty! Do you s'pose (to Thompson and Schwartz) that he was trying to get us to do his dirty work for him? He said that whiskey was a birthday present. A

birthday present! Come on, boys, let's give him another one.

Strong. Steady, boys, steady! You have made one bad blunder already today. Do not make another.

Thompson. You bet we won't. We've got this gentleman, Shorty, with the goods on him.

Strong. Forget it, boys.

Thompson. Can't. He mighty near made us string you up. Dunno how he come to fool us so. Glad we didn't go through with it. Obligated to you, Miss Branscombe. Sorry, Strong. Didn't mean no harm. We'll eat dirt for a month, Strong.

Strong. Never mind, Thompson. Bad advice and bad whiskey are the rottenest combination I know. You fellows had both.

Thompson. Never more for your Uncle Thompson. Sorry, though, Jim. Do better next time. Shake?

Strong. Sure! (Business.)

Hank (shakes hands). Mighty sorry, Strong. Mighty sorry.

Schwartz. Sorry. Most sorry. (Shakes hands.)

Thompson. Ready, boys? We'll put a run on Shorty that'll make him short of breath.

Hank and Schwartz. Ready!

All Three. Whoo-ee-e! (Rush off stage.)

Strong. Joy, dearest, how did you come so exactly on time? And how dared you come at all? They were utterly irresponsible, and might have harmed you for interfering. They were

crazy drunk, though they are considerably sobered now. How did you know?

Joy. Wing told me. He heard them. I had started away with John and Alta when I remembered that you were to have supper with us to-night. I rode back to tell Wing, and he told me of their plot. I lost time by going to the lower grove, but I saw Shorty there, so rode on here. He was fixing the evidence which would prove you guilty and clear him of suspicion, when they found you. (Shudders). Oh, if it hadn't been for that blessed Chinaman, I might never have known!

Strong (embracing and comforting Joy). Dearest, we shall have cause for thankfulness every day of our lives.

(Enter Miss Woodbe U. R.)

Miss Woodbe (in riding costume, throwing arms about Joy). My dear! My dear! What an experience! Wing told us when we rode back for you. And Schwartz, whose horse had thrown him while they were chasing those horrible creatures, told us the rest. How brave you are!

(Enter Tommy and Reddy, excitedly, U. L.)

Miss Woodbe (rushing over to Reddy and throwing herself into his reluctant arms). Dear Mr. Reddy, protect me! Protect me! That terrible person is still at large. Say that you will protect me from him. I fear him so!

Reddy (looking helpless, and trying vainly to safely remove his support). Cheer up, lady. He aint so dangerous. (She clutches him, fran-

tically. Determinedly he plants her squarely and firmly on her feet, and retreats.) Don't get excited. (She moves pleadingly toward him. He backs off, mopping brow.) Quit it. I aint strong enough for such vi'lent exercise, lady. Honest. (Mops brow.)

Branscombe (enters). You are safe, Joy? Sure you are not hurt? Not a little bit? Those drunken brutes might have torn you to bits for breaking in as you did. This heat added to bad whiskey makes demons out of harmless dummies. It is a mighty bad business, Strong, mighty bad. But it clears you. Clears you completely. Glad. Hope you will overlook what I said this morning. Disturbed. Much disturbed! (They shake hands.)

(Enter Thompson and Hank, Schwartz limping in a little later, followed by Wing, much excited.)

Thompson. They made a get-away. Couldn't catch 'em. They had their horses handy and ran for it.

Hank. Too bad the Canadian border is so near. But there's one satisfaction,—we made 'em go some.

Wing. Oh, Missee Blanscombe, you fine li'l gal. Fine li'l gal. You smart. You blave. Me make fine flesh laspbelly pie for you.

Joy. Wing, you blessed creature, how did you get here? (Shakes hands.) You helped me save the life of the man I love, and I shall thank you for it all the days of my life. How did you get here?

Wing (rubbing himself painfully). Me lode mule. Hard work. Me glad that Shorty man gone to Clanada. He bad man. Big boots. (Rubs self.)

(Miss Woodbe slips unnoticed to Reddy's side.)

Branscombe. Boys, right here seems as good a time as any to announce the approaching marriage of my sister and your foreman, Mr. Strong. You came mighty near depriving me of a splendid brother-in-law, today.

(Boys look embarrassed, and shuffle about uncomfortably.)

Miss Woodbe. This is so sudden. (Swoons into Reddy's reluctant arms. He holds her, helpless and embarrassed. Mops brow. Strong and Joy join hands.)

Tommy. Three cheers, boys! Three!

(Reddy abruptly releases Miss Woodbe, who recovers herself suddenly, and looks reproachfully at him.)

All (waving hats). For JOY OF THE L V. Whoo-ee-e! Whoo-ee-e! Whoo-ee-e.

CURTAIN.





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